Metaphysics: In Search of the Alphabet of Being

Syllabus

Who: Uriah Kriegel, theuriah@gmail.com
Where: Humanities 227
When: Tuesday and Thursday 10:50–12:05
Office hours: Thursday 12:30–1:30 + by appointment [+ special office hours 12:30-3PM on 2/4, 2/27, and 7/4]

Description

Physics tries to break down physical reality into its smallest parts. Metaphysics tries to break down all of reality into its most fundamental dimensions: the categories of beings that make up reality as a whole. It has been described as the search for the "alphabet of being." In this course, we will delve into the metaphysics of what are arguably the three most fundamental categories of being: objects, properties, and facts. And we will use some of the most important pieces in contemporary metaphysics as a springboard to try and develop our own critical perspective on the issues that come up in this ultimate type of inquiry.

Textbook(-ish)

David M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schedule

1) Organizational introduction: what we do here – 1/14

2) Philosophical introduction: what is metaphysics? – 1/16

<u>Module 1: Properties</u>

3) Realism: analysis – 1/21
    Reading: Armstrong, "Properties"

4) Realism: critical discussion -1/23

No Reading

5) Nominalism: analysis -1/28

Reading: Rodriguez-Pereyra, "Resemblance Nominalism and Russell's Regress"

6) Nominalism: critical discussion -1/30

No Reading

7) Trope theory: analysis – 2/4

Reading: Campbell, "The Metaphysic of Abstract Particulars"

[special office hours 12:30-3PM]

8) Trope theory: critical discussion – 2/11

No Reading

9) Armstrong's realist theory: analysis – 2/18

Reading: Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, Ch.3

10) Armstrong's realist theory: critical discussion – 2/20

No Reading

Module 2: Objects

11) Bundle theory: analysis – 2/25

Reading: Van Cleve, "Three Versions of the Bundle Theory"

12) Bundle theory: critical discussion – 2/27

No Reading

[special office hours 12:30-3PM]

13) Substrate theory: analysis – 3/3

Reading: Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, Ch. 7

→ Mid-term essay due (1000-2000 words)

14) Substrate theory: critical discussion – 3/5

No Reading

15) Mereological universalism: analysis – 3/10

Reading: Van Cleve, "Mereological Essentialism, Mereological Conjunctivism, and Identity through Time"

16) Mereological universalism: critical discussion – 3/12

No Reading

17) Priority monism: analysis – 3/24

Reading: Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole"

18) Priority monism: critical discussion – 3/26

No Reading

Module 3: States of Affairs

19) States of affairs as mereological wholes: analysis – 3/31

Reading: Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, Ch. 8

20) States of affairs as mereological wholes: critical discussion – 4/2

No Reading

21) States of affairs as non-mereological wholes: analysis – 4/7

Reading: Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs*, Ch. 9

[special office hours 12:30-3PM]

22) States of affairs as non-mereological wholes: critical discussion – 4/14

No Reading

23) States of affairs as simples: analysis – 4/16

Reading: Skyrms, "Tractarian Nominalism"

24) States of affairs as simples: critical discussion – 4/21

No Reading

25) Conclusion: what to believe – 4/23

No Reading

→ Final essay due (2000-3000 words)

Classroom discussion – three questions to answer:

1) What is the central *thesis* of the article/chapter? [usually on Tuesday]
2) What is the main *argument* for that thesis? [usually on Tuesday]
3) Are we convinced (by the argument and of the thesis)? [usually on Thursday]

Requirements:

1) Before sessions 3, 5, 7, 9, 13, 15: send me a one-sentence statement of the paper's main thesis (5 best grades count)
2) Before sessions 17, 19, 21, 23: send me a one-paragraph reconstruction of the paper's main argument (3 best grades count)
3) Submit mid-term and final essays on the dates they are due (every late day incurs a half-grade penalty)

Grade breakdown:

5 best weekly thesis statements: 3% each, 15% together
3 best weekly argument statements: 5% each, 15% together
Mid-term essay: 30%
Final essay: 40%
Participation: tie-breaker

Boilerplate: code of honor etc.